

Biographies of Living People



Introduction

Many people would like to see themselves covered on Wikipedia, and many people would like to see Wikipedia cover those whom they feel deserve an article. Wikipedia is one of the top ten most accessed sites on the Internet, and thus it has the ability to bring subjects to a wide audience, providing a single location for an overview of the subjects and their lives.

However, before writing a biography for Wikipedia, there are a few

things to keep in mind. First and foremost, Wikipedia is a collaborative environment, and no one person has final say over the direction articles take. In addition, articles are intended as neutral biographies - and that means that they can potentially cover all aspects of a person's life, both good and bad. Thus the possibility of increased attention for the positive aspects of a person's life need to be weighed against potential coverage

of issues should things go wrong. There are also a number of policies and guidelines which Wikipedia uses to manage articles, and these are especially strong when it comes to living people.

This pamphlet should lead you through some of these issues, but it presumes that the reader has prior experience in editing Wikipedia articles. If this is not the case, you may wish to check "Editing Wikis" for a quick overview.

Policies and Guidelines

Inclusion Standards

Wikipedia can't have articles on everyone. Thus it has a set of inclusion standards which determine whether or not a subject can be included in Wikipedia. These are typically referred to as the "notability guidelines", although "notability" is not used here in the usual sense, as it relates to the existence of sufficient coverage rather than importance. Thus the General Notability Guideline focuses on sourcing: are there multiple reliable sources providing non-trivial coverage of the subject? If so, the subject may be a good fit for Wikipedia. If not, it may not be able to be included.

Along with the general guidelines, there are specific guidelines to cover narrowly-defined topics, such as authors, actors and politicians.

Conflicts of Interest

While Wikipedia acknowledges that people may have a conflict of interest, this does not prevent them from editing. That said, it can be difficult for someone to write a balanced article, and thus it is recommended that people in that situation refrain from editing the article directly, ask a neutral editor

to consider creating it, and make suggestions on the associated discussion page.

Verifiability and Reliable Sources

Wikipedia does not assume any particular subject-specific expertise from contributors. When combined with the anonymous status of contributors, it becomes impossible for Wikipedia to rely on personal knowledge to justify contributions. Instead, Wikipedia emphasises the notion of "verifiability". Anything added to Wikipedia should be verifiable by any other contributor. To allow for this, all information that has been challenged or is likely to be challenged should contain a reference to the original source. This does not need to be online, but it does need to be accessible - and it has to be considered reliable. Personal information should only be included where it has been widely published in reliable sources, and where it is not seen as an undue invasion of their privacy.

Neutral Point of View and Due Weight

A core pillar of Wikipedia is the concept of a neutral point of view (often shortened to NPOV).

Wikipedia aims to provide balanced and neutral accounts of subjects. This is often difficult to do, and not always successful, but it is a worthy aim, and one which all contributors are expected to support.

In practice, this means that information needs to be carefully worded so as to be presented as neutrally as possible, and that multiple viewpoints will need to be respected. Remember to stick to facts, not opinions, and keep in mind the notion of due weight: a balanced view requires authors to avoid over emphasising one aspect of a subject's life beyond its actual significance.

Copyright

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As part of this, photos added to articles also need to be released under a free use license. There is some provision for the use of media under fair use, but this rarely extends to photographs of living people.

